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Kıtaplara vakfedilen bir ömre tuhfe  
İsmail E. Erünsal'a  
Armağan

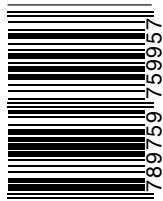
Kütüphanecilik, kitap tarihi ve edebiyat tarihi alanlarındaki çalışmaları ile tanınan ve hayatının 33 yılını akademik camiada geçiren İsmail E. Erünsal, İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Kütüphanecilik Bölümü'nde (1977-1990) ve Marmara Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Arşivcilik Bölümü'nde (1990-2010) öğretim üyesi olarak çalışmıştır. Her biri sahasında tanınmış onlarca kitap ve makaleleri arasında, *The Life and Works Tacî-zade Cafer Çelebi with a Critical Edition of His Divân* (1983); *Menâkıbu'l-Kudsiyye fî Menâsibi'l-Ünsiyye* (Ahmet Yaşar Ocak ile, 1984); *Türk Kütüphaneleri Tarihi* (1988); *Osmanlı Vakıf Kütüphaneleri: Tarihî Gelişimi ve Organizasyonu* (2008); *XV. XVI. Asır Bayramî Melamiliği'nin Kaynaklarından Abdurrahman el-Askerî'nin Mir'atü'l-Işk'ı* (2008); *The Archival Sources of Turkish Literary History* (2008), *Aslına Dönüş: Mısır Valisi Mehmed Ali Paşa'nın Kavala kasabası ile ilgili Bağları: Mimari Eserler, Kitabeler ve Belgeler* (Heat W. Lowry ile, 2011); *Osmanlılarda Sahaflık ve Sahaflar* (2013) gibi her biri kendi alanında temel başvuru kaynağı olan önemli eserleri bulunmaktadır. Hayatını ilme ve araştırmaya adanmış olan Erünsal'ın eserleri, saha çalışanları için vazgeçilmez eserler haline gelmesinin yanı sıra çok sayıda araştırmaya metodolojik açıdan rehberlik de etmektedir.

Yorulmak bilmeden çalışan ve ilme hizmeti kendisine şiar edinmiş olan İsmail E. Erünsal'a armağan edilmek üzere, her biri alanında tanınmış meslektaşlarının yazdığı makalelerden oluşan "Tuhfe" iki ciltte toplandı. Erünsal Hocanın dostu, arkadaşı ve öğrencileri olan akademisyenlerin yazılarının yer aldığı ve muhtelif konuları ele alan toplam 44 makale, bu *Armağan* vesilesiyle ilk defa yayınlanmaktadır.

Bu *Armağan*, ilmî kişiliğiyle birçok araştırmacıya örnek olan İsmail E. Erünsal'ın hayatı hakkında ayrıntılı bilgi sunmasının yanı sıra tarih, edebiyat, tasavvuf, kütüphanecilik ve arşivcilik sahasındaki meraklı araştırmacılara eşsiz bir kaynak niteliği taşımaktadır.

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İsmail E. Erünsal'a

Armağan

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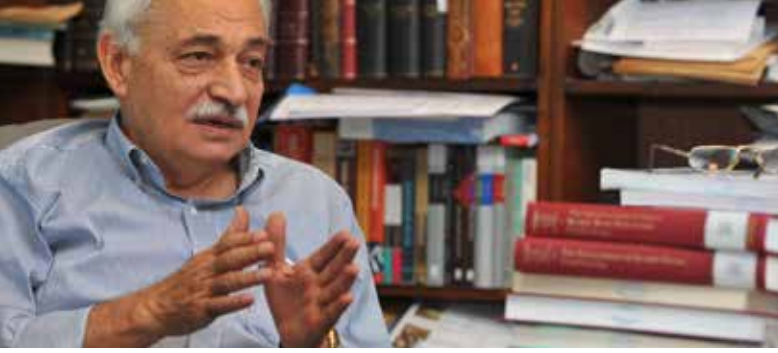
EDEBİYAT VE TASAVVUF

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KİTAPLARA VAKFEDİLEN

BİR ÖMRE TUHFE



# *İsmail E. Erünsal'a* *r m a ğ a n*

## 2

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EDEBİYAT VE TASAVVUF

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KÜTÜPHANECİLİK VE ARŞİVCİLİK

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rafından gerçek manasıyla bir “hocaşâde” olarak yetiştirilmiş, onun vefatından sonra da bu vasfını korumakla kalmayarak geliştirmeye de dikkat etmiş, şiirlerinde kendisine bu ünvanla hitap etmiş, hayrû'l-halef bir dersiâm evlâdı olmuştur.

Onun bu kimliğini pekiştiren bir diğer niteliği de, şahsiyetini oluşturmakta en büyük ve en etkili kaynak kabul edilmesi gereken *Kur'ân-ı Kerîm*'in hâfızı olmasıdır. Nitekim erken yaşlarda başladığı hâfızlığını her halükârda yılmadan çalışarak, hayatının son devresi olan Mısır yıllarında “demir hafız” derecesine çıkarmakla kalmamıştır. O ayrıca *Kur'ân*'ın, Türkçe meâlini de hazırlayacak ilmî, edebî ve ahlâkî liyâkate ulaşmış müstesnâ bir kişiliğe sahip bulunduğu devrin ilim ve edebiyat muhitlerinde kabul edilmiş mühim bir simâdır.<sup>100</sup>

100 Mehmed Âkif Ersoy'un günümüze kadar, edebî ve ahlâkî özellikleri üzerinde yeterince durulduğu aşikâr olmakla beraber, bir iki makale dışında onun ilmi kimliği üzerinde aynı titizlikle durulduğunu söylemek mümkün değildir. Bu sebeple Âkif Bey'in dinî-ilmî yönü üzerinde yapılacak nitelikli çalışmalara ihtiyaç olduğu ortadadır.

## The gift of letters: correspondence between Nergisi (d. 1634) and Veysi (d. 1627)

Christine Woodhead\*

‘Meeting with you was like being in Paradise.’ So begins the first of three letters written by Nergisi to his fellow *kadi* Veysi and copied into the second recension of his *münşe’at* in late 1626 or early 1627. It reflects upon a recent meeting between the two which probably occurred some time in 1625 as Nergisi passed through Veysi’s judicial seat at Üsküb in northern Macedonia on the way to his own posting in distant Elbasan in western Albania. Study of this small group of letters, and the one reply from Veysi which accompanies them, permits further thoughts on the nature, form and functions of early seventeenth-century letters in Ottoman literary correspondence.<sup>1</sup>

The Nergisi-Veysi correspondence does not contain letters of overt congratulation, consolation, recommendation, petition or request, such as might be sent to a professional superior or poten-

\* University of Durham.

1 The edition used here is that published by J. R. Walsh, “The *Esâlibü’l-mekâtib* (*Münşe’ât*) of Mehmed Nergîsi Efendi,” *Archivum Ottomanicum* 1 (1969): 281, n.56 for the date of this first letter. No student of Walsh at the University of Edinburgh in the 1970s could have failed to realise that he was as much an expert on *inşa* prose as he was on *divan* poetry, though most of his publications concerned the latter. The present essay is offered to İsmail Bey in the knowledge that he will probably know better than anyone what our *hoca* would have made of it.



tial patron, and which constitute the majority of letters in most *münşe'at* collections, including that of Nergisi.<sup>2</sup> These four letters comprise only around one tenth of the 38 included in the second recension of Nergisi's *münşe'at*, and an even smaller proportion of the 50 or so letters contained in later copies.<sup>3</sup> Nor are these letters intended to communicate factual information or to narrate events. Despite Nergisi's repeated professions of inferiority and reverence towards the slightly older and consequently, as a writer, better-known Veysi, these are letters exchanged between two men of relatively equal status in both a professional and a literary sense. Neither was in a position to advance the professional career of the other. These are therefore primarily letters of friendship and respect. Each writer asks, and expects, little more of the other than the satisfaction of a continuing exchange of stylistically demanding letters with an appreciative correspondent. The result may place the letters stylistically at one extreme end of the letter-writing spectrum, but the reason for writing, i.e. the function of the letters of friendship in creating and maintaining a comforting bond between two people of similar outlook and situation, is central to human experience.

Evaluating literary letters as a whole, and those of friendship in particular, benefits from a comparative approach. Most scholars of Ottoman literary letters would probably accept the following as an appropriate characterization of their material: 'poetic, obscure, elaborate, brief, densely decorated'.<sup>4</sup> Equally, it appears that the general tone of the majority of such letters is one of complaint, often of loneliness – particularly of 'exile' in a posting away from the capital city – or of misfortune brought about by rivals.

2 Cf. İ. Hakkı Aksoyak, *Gelibolulu Mustafa Âli: Menşeu'l-inşâ* (Ankara, 2007), for a similarly small number of letters of friendship – seven according to Ali's arrangement, out of a total of 79.

3 Walsh, 'Esālībū'l-mekātīb', 218-19.

4 Margaret Mullett, *Letters, literacy and literature in Byzantium* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 2.

In sum, life was difficult and 'those who were neither relations nor friends were regarded as enemies'.<sup>5</sup> That the quotations given here are taken from studies on twelfth-century Byzantine and western European letters respectively, and are echoed in studies of Renaissance humanist letters shows that such characteristics (and if we look further, several others) were shared by writers of literary letters of friendship in different cultures and different eras. To such topics must obviously be added the long, and for Ottomans much closer, tradition of *ihvaniyyat*, letters of friendship in the Arabic tradition.<sup>6</sup> Studies of such non-Ottoman letters provide valuable comparative insights. Aside from the coincidence that the letters of Archbishop Theophylact of Ohrid were written by a senior religio-administrative official from a Balkan location almost en route between the later Ottoman centres of Üsküb and Elbasan, and whose centre of professional gravity was the same city, i.e. Constantinople/Istanbul, Margaret Mullett's approach to Theophylact's collection shows how such material can contribute significantly to the study of social networks and cultural outlook. This takes us a long way from the notion that such letters in Ottoman were 'merely flowery letters of compliment'.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, a major point made in discussions of medieval and Renaissance letters is that an upsurge in the writing of literary letters normally coincides with a period of intense intellectual debate and expansion of learned outlook. While the intensification of Ottoman letter-writing in the late sixteenth and particularly in the early seventeenth century can be attributed in part to the disadvantages of being distant from the centre of culture and patronage, can it be similarly symptomatic of intellectual development?

5 Giles Constable, *Letters and letter-collections* (Turnhout, 1976), 15.

6 Adrian Gully, *The culture of letter-writing in pre-modern Islamic society* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 1-23.

7 V.L. Ménage, "The *Gül-i sad-berg* of Mesîhî," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 7-8 (1988): 15.

On the other hand, writers of 'flowery letters' were themselves clearly aware that these were not always appropriate. In his recent study of the letters of al-Nabulusi (d. 1731), Samer Akkach discusses how the Damascene scholar collected and sorted his letters. Although early in his career al-Nabulusi was a proficient writer of literary letters, the first letter in his collection states that such 'correspondence among brothers, following the widely known literary style (*'alā al-tarīqa al-adabiyya*) is a practice we are bored with' and none are included in his collection. However, al-Nabulusi's use and appreciation of such correspondence was determined by his situation and priorities in life, and he appears to have returned to it, if intermittently, later in life.<sup>8</sup> What, then, were the circumstances in which literary letters were appropriate?

By themselves, a handful of Nergisi-Veysi letters can contribute only so much to a wider understanding of the function of such writing, but each small step adds gradually to the larger picture. This essay considers two principal points: the value of translation in making literary letters more accessible, and the types of theme and motif contained within this sample of letters.

### Translating Ottoman literary letters

Unless noted otherwise, all the translations used in this essay are mine. This immediately raises several problems. The first set of difficulties arises from my own efforts to accurately decode certain aspects of a consciously artful text, and to fully appreciate some of the broader cultural allusions within it. For errors of this nature, which will be obvious to Turkish colleagues, Nergisi's dedicatory plea to *Şeyhülislam* Yahya Efendi in the introduction to his *münşe'at* is relevant.

8 Samer Akkach, *Letters of a sufi scholar: the correspondence of 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (1641-1731)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 26-8.

For someone like me, full of enthusiasm but raw and inexperienced in the skills of knowledge, what capacity does he have to enable him readily to seek forgiveness for his errors and pardon for his faults, as do the masters in the workshop of eloquence? In such times of unpreparedness and intervals of sad perplexity, how far do the incoherent words and phrases which issue from the disordered and hesitant mind of such a person, of little stock and lowly status – how far do these merit only finger-wagging ridicule? May I be bold enough to ask that you forgive and overlook my errors.<sup>9</sup>

A more fundamental set of problems arises from the decision to translate these letters at all. There is a strong argument for not doing so, out of respect for the artistry of the original. Paintings are never reproduced in modern guise, unless as some entertaining or educative jigsaw puzzle or cartoon. Translating, or in the case of pictures, copying, takes away the conscious artistry of the original. And in the case of *inşa* prose, there have always been serious doubts as to whether translation – and sometimes even just reading the original – is worth the effort.

However, unless this type of composition is to be ring-fenced as a specialist curiosity it must be made more widely available, to both Turkish-speaking and non-Turkish-speaking scholars. Transcribed editions are essential for determining the grammar of a text and for the fact of publication in accessible form, but using these effectively probably still requires most readers to have recourse to a phalanx of dictionaries, and, in effect, for each to re-invent the wheel. At the other extreme, a text can be summarised in a modern language and gutted for its essential points, a tempting compromise though one which can produce quite banal results and, in the case of literary letters with apparently little 'content', a tendency for all letters to merge into one. Moreover, summary translations would not get us very far in un-

9 Walsh, "*Esālībū'l-mekātīb*," 228.



derstanding the nature of the letters themselves and why they were written as they were.

In between transcription and summary translation are at least two further options, as discussed by Gottfried Hagen in a study of Ottoman translators of Persian biographies of the Prophet.<sup>10</sup> One option, semantic translation, remains as close as possible to the source text, with the presumed advantage that the translator cannot easily gloss over or avoid phrases he or she does not quite understand and that in this sense the translation will be more 'correct'. However, while more authentic in its relationship to the original, such a translation is often too awkwardly phrased to be acceptable in the target language and the constraints imposed by the source text are still visible. Nergisi, who translated two works from Arabic and one from Persian, had a similar view on this 'rendering of the words of the source text in their exact arrangement': such translation is unclear and 'does not have a share in the sweet witness of gracious elegance and the downy hair and beauty mark of eloquence and rhetoric'.<sup>11</sup>

The other option, communicative translation, appears in many ways more attractive. It strives to convey the original meaning and effect in a style and register which will be acceptable to the intended readership and hence make the work potentially more successful. The Ottoman translators discussed by Hagen are generally closer to the communicative than semantic approach, as indicated again by Nergisi. He preferred 'to take the meaning of the speech and ... to embellish [the original] with appropriate words and expressions and phrases and

metaphors' in order to put across the author's intention 'in a nice way and attractive manner'.<sup>12</sup>

The disadvantages of communicative translation are that this runs the risk of presenting writers and texts from a different culture primarily through later eyes and according to later priorities, ours not theirs. Mis-interpretation and reading too much into the text are the obvious pitfalls. Moreover, communicative translations may not remain as durable as the semantic when literary tastes change.<sup>13</sup> In the late nineteenth century Gibb's decision to translate Ottoman poetry into an already semi-archaic style of English produced what now appear to be unusually strained effects. His rendering of the first two *beyts* in Baki's (d.1008/1600) autumn *gazel* reads:

*Ah! Ne'er a trace of springtide's olden splendour doth remain  
Fall'n from the treen, the leaves bestrew the mead, their  
glory vain.*

*The orchard trees have clad themselves in tattered dervish  
weddes  
The autumn blast hath torn away the hands from off the  
plane.*

Almost a century later, Walsh translated the same verses as:

*Spring has gone and left behind no sign or trace  
Leaves, in falling from their branches fell from grace.  
Robed in poverty the trees stand, while the plane  
Bids with trembling hands the cold wind to its place.*<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Gottfried Hagen, "Translations and translators in a multilingual society: a case study of Persian-Ottoman translations, late fifteenth to early seventeenth century," *Eurasian Studies* 2, no 1 (2003): 95-134.

<sup>11</sup> Hagen, "Translations and translators," 114 (his translation of Nergisi, from an extract quoted in A.S. Levend, *Türk edebiyatı tarihi, vol. 1: giriş* (Ankara: TTK, 1973), 83.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. In his unpublished notes on Nergisi, Walsh describes him as taking 'the broadest liberty' in his approach to translation.

<sup>13</sup> But see Hagen, "Translations and translators," 125 ff., on the value of contemporary judgements of translations for assessing developments in Ottoman language use.

<sup>14</sup> E.J.W. Gibb, *A history of Ottoman poetry*, vol. 3 (London: Luzac & Co., 1904), 158; John R. Walsh in Nermin Menemencioğlu ed., *The Penguin*

The touchstone for translating Ottoman prose into modern English remains the style developed by Andreas Tietze in his translations of Mustafa Ali's (d.1008/1600) *Counsel for sultans of 1581* and his *Description of Cairo*. The weighty resonance of Ali's lengthy sentences built up in parallel phrases is turned into measured and authoritative English.

Men of understanding and wisdom, the owners of intelligence and sagacity, are cognizant and aware of the incontestable truth that the well-meaning great philosophers and eminent thinkers of penetrating mind have regarded justice and equity as coins of standard purity on the scales of popularity and prestige, and reliability and integrity as gold currency of high validity and value on the goldsmith's balance of the era.<sup>15</sup>

It helps here that Ali, despite his consciously complex prose style, had a strong case to make and a clear line of argument. Tietze's English translation is closer to the semantic than the communicative. Whether translation of more evocative literary letters can be as successful remains to be seen. Hagen's study shows that the approach to translation clearly taken by sixteenth and seventeenth-century Ottoman translators such as Celalzade (d. 975/1567), Ahizade 'Abdulhalim (d. 1013/1604) and Nergisi (d. 1044/1635) himself was that the source text merely provided a basis or a jumping-off point for a rather different product of their own, and that it was perfectly valid to omit some sections and examples, to introduce new ones, and to write not simply in a different language but sometimes in a different register altogether. While such a view can hardly apply in its entirety to present-day translations made for academic purposes, it nevertheless allows a certain scope for interpretation.

.....  
*book of Turkish verse* (London: Penguin, 1978), 91. Both Gibb and Walsh translated poetry as poetry, using a regular quantitative metre and an appropriate rhyme scheme.

- 15 Andreas Tietze (ed. and trans.), *Mustafa 'Alî's Counsel for Sultans of 1581*, vol. 1 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1979), 17.

### Themes and motifs in letters of friendship

Margaret Mullett has described the Byzantine letter as 'tak[ing] on functions of verse in other literatures, as a vehicle for emotion, in its compression and grace'.<sup>16</sup> How do literary letters compare in the Ottoman world, where poetry was well established as the principal 'emotional' outlet? To what extent did letters provide freedom of opportunity for writers to develop themes and motifs to express emotion either more extended than, or quite different from, those evident in *divan* poetry? Is there a greater – or just a different – range of vocabulary and topics in letters than in *gazels*, *kasides*, etc? Or is there, in fact, very little difference between the two? It is evident that letters, like *gazels*, approach their principal theme through a series of separate motifs, rather than by consistent development of a single one. Why then did someone who was both *şair* and *münşi* choose to write a *gazel* on one occasion, and a *mektub* on another? Was it simply more appropriate to present a *gazel* when present in person and to send a *mektub* when far away? The evidence from the four letters analyzed below can serve only to highlight motifs employed by two writers on one particular theme, but such questions should be kept in mind.

The principal images used by Nergisi and Veysi in these letters are those of: jewels in a necklace, i.e. careful construction of sentences and threading words effectively upon a string; having an appropriate capital or stock of words at one's command; the separation of rose and nightingale; the anticipation of a letter's arrival and the childlike joy in receiving it; not having enough time to polish the text; and for Nergisi in particular, being bereft and beset by enemies, and being an incompetent and error-prone beginner in comparison to his correspondent. For reasons partly of space,

- 16 M.E. Mullett, "Originality in the Byzantine letter: the case of exile," in A.R. Littlewood ed., *Originality in Byzantine literature, art and music* (Oxford: Oxbow, 1995), 48.

letters are not translated here in their entirety; what follows is part translation, part comment, with the primary intention of drawing attention to the structure and themes of the letters. Full transcriptions of the originals will be found in Walsh's edition.

### Letter 1: Nergisi to Veysi

*Sent from Elbasan to the incomparable master, the jewel of the age, Veysi Efendi, in answer to an illustrious letter received from his most noble self.*<sup>17</sup>

Following a brief salutation in Arabic verse, Nergisi begins 'this most reverential and sincere letter' from 'this most deficient and lowest of admirers', as a courteous reply to Veysi. The letter contains four principal motifs, centred around the theme of Nergisi's happy memories of meeting Veysi and his present feelings of loneliness and loss in comparison: 'a passing encounter with noble company is a source of pleasure and delight'.<sup>18</sup>

#### (i) Collecting the jewels of Veysi's eloquence

This begins with the phrase 'Meeting with you was like being in paradise' and presents Nergisi as a desperate admirer grateful for any time spent in Veysi's cultivated presence.

Those precious jewels of a hundred branches of knowledge, at which the grasping charlatan of my weak intellect clutched, clawlike; those gems which are each one part of the stock of life's bazaar of honours, which are forever ornaments in the diadem of respect – one by one I threaded them on the necklace of my mind and stored them in the coffer of my memory.

17 Walsh, "Esālībū'l-mekātīb," 281-83: letter 26. Undated, as are all Nergisi's letters, but suggested by Walsh from internal evidence to have been written probably in 1625. As this heading indicates, there were other letters in the Nergisi-Veysi correspondence which were not included by Nergisi in this recension.

18 Walsh, "Esālībū'l-mekātīb," 282.

#### (ii) A helpless child by comparison

Nergisi next pictures himself as a child in a cradle, unable to be consoled by 'agitated well-wishers' who attempt to calm him in his distress.

When, at every turn, this infant with his poor and limited speech has cried at the many and threatening misfortunes of daily life and his uncontrolled cries of distress have risen to the heavens, he has found much consolation through placing around his neck a handful of these pearls stamped with order and regularity into a pendant [for consideration?].

#### (iii) His own unhappy situation

Casting himself thirdly as a miserable wretch 'in this place of fruitless quarrels ... distressed by the assaults of idle spectators who rejoice in the misfortunes of others', Nergisi portrays himself as the nightingale to Veysi's rose:

*With no scent from your rose, nor message from your thorn  
How can the heart find any pleasure in captivity in this cage?*

#### (iv) Looking back to his meeting with Veysi

In order to console himself, Nergisi recalls the wonderful days together which were 'equal to thousands upon thousands of feasts of sacrifice or new year celebrations; ... each hour was better even than the perfection of the Night of Power'. Remembrance of Veysi's 'sincere affection' allowed him 'to erase with the penknife of honour and respect the griefs and sorrows engraved on the tablet of my heart'.

Letter 1 concludes with (i) a prayer that 'the pages in the book of [Veysi's] honour and prosperity be always free from inappropriate flourishes of the letter characters associated with vexation and ... associated with the golden orange ball of the sun which adorns the [title page of the] almanac of heaven'; and (ii) two Persian *beyts* lamenting their separation.

## Letter 2: Veysi to Nergisi

*When Veysi Efendi received the above dismal letter, I – this grief-accustomed, weak-minded one – was honoured by receiving from his noble self the treasured gift copied faithfully here.*<sup>19</sup>

Veysi's reply opens with two verses, one containing a corresponding rose/nightingale image, the second a comment on the nature of their correspondence: 'speech is fleeting; all else is word-painting'.<sup>20</sup> His letter contains three motifs, a comment on practicalities, and a final brief image presented as a postscript.

### (i) Avidly awaiting a letter<sup>21</sup>

Spring and new life are the principal elements of this first section: a spring breeze 'opens the blossom of the world of the soul', it 'brings the perfume of friends' and 'greetings from the rose to the lamenting nightingale'. Veysi depicts himself 'keeping watch on the mountain paths' for Nergisi's messenger. There is great excitement when the latter appears on the winding road.

*And what joy! The sealed letter which comes from a heart's companion  
Is like an unopened rose bud fresh from the nine seven-folded heavens*

### (ii) Stock of goods

Veysi's second section is a rather mixed motif in praise of Nergisi's letter, casting him as 'the embroiderer in the workshop of

rhetoric' who lays out in front of 'the merchant of the emporium of perception' many-coloured silks never seen before. Juxtaposed with this notion of high accomplishment is the 'low-throbbing, deceptive and attractive sound of the song of the lowest string of your single-reed flute'.

### (iii) Jewels

The motif now changes abruptly to one concerning 'the jewels of meaning and metaphor'. When these are fashioned by 'the assayer who operates the scales of justice and fairness' into a necklace or jewelled belt for 'a wealthy, chaste and secluded lady', the nightingale sings a new song and 'the arched vault of the sky re-sounds with shouts of praise'.

### (iv) Lack of time

In a sudden change of tone, Veysi excuses the brevity of his letter: 'the restless courier makes ill-timed demands. It must suffice to send only these shallow, ill-thought-out phrases'. He then assures Nergisi of the good service of his servant and messenger Hacı Çavuş, referring also to some unspecified difficulty (probably legal) being experienced by the latter, about which he may have consulted Veysi.

### (iii) Apology for rough copy and delay

Veysi's apologetic postscript suggests the care and enjoyment he would normally expend upon a letter.

Due to the delays caused by various irritations, my pen has had no opportunity to beautify the whiteness of a fair copy, as a dextrous lady's maid might add rouge to the disordered appearance of the young virgin bride. May you pardon the fact that it has no embellishment, and has been delayed for several days. God willing, this is intended to make amends.

19 Walsh, 283-84: letter 27. This letter is also given in full transcription in Halil İbrahim Haksever, "Veysi ve Nergisi'nin karşılıklı mektupları," *Afyon Kocatepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 2, no 2 (2001): 180-82. Prof. Haksever's 1995 thesis, "Eski Türk edebiyatında münşeât'lar ve Nergisi'nin münşeât'ı," was not available to me at the time of writing.

20 'ibārāt-ārā'ī

21 Cf. Akkach, *Letters of a sufi scholar*, 17-21, on commercial and private postal systems in the Ottoman Arab lands in al-Nabulusi's era.

### Letter 3: Nergisi to Veysi

no title<sup>22</sup>

This letter begins in gazel format, around the motifs of fire, smoke, water and weeping.

*Separation from you burns a fire in my heart  
With flames of constancy, sparks of endurance  
From the burning of my heart in longing for you  
The smoke of my sighs reaches as far as the Tigris  
Water becomes fire, like a flash of flame  
Clouds become fire-laden, like lightning  
I weep from sorrow, and from weeping am wretched  
The more you ask, the more miserable I am.  
After a verse in Arabic, a verse in Persian follows:  
The dust of your threshold is denied me  
For how worthy in this head of that crown?*

#### (i) Veysi's letter as a restorative

Nergisi begins with a clear statement that letters are vehicles for complaint against 'the good fortune of those deniers of facts who are on the side of the enemy', presenting himself as 'a weak and powerless body, a soul of whom all trace has been lost'. In this context Veysi's 'intricately composed letter is a health-restoring exemplar for one whose few comforts have all been blown away and scattered'; it is 'like a book of rules for good health for physicians aspiring to the skills of Plato' and has brought 'new life to arteries and sinews'. Receiving it is 'like being granted a place in eternal life; like the miracles of the Messiah, it brings forth strength'.

#### (ii) Re-iteration of appreciation

The motif of Veysi's letter bringing joy in the midst of tribula-

22 Walsh, 284-86: letter 28

tion is addressed a second time in the context of Nergisi's journey through life.

For almost fifty years I have been an avid traveller, a guest in time's warm room(s). In various ups and downs, in good times and bad, I have witnessed innumerable strange and wonderful things. In the descent and ascent in and out of misfortune as I tramp the roads of comprehension and enlightenment, I have been taken by pleasant surprises and burdened by unpleasant afflictions; I have tasted both sorrow and grief. In the well-polished mirror of life, I have often seen now pleasure, now pain, now joy, now suffering. However, as God knows, the life-enriching happiness which was manifested in my dejected, troubled mind in that happy hour when your letter arrived ... was unprecedented. It produced the kind of joy and delightful state of excitement felt in the heart of a child when he first sees and experiences something special.

#### (iii) Fruitless search for a suitable reply

The third motif in this letter is one of desperation of a different kind, that of being unable to find the right words for an appropriate reply and a graceful style of expression.

The broker of imagination was sent into the market of a mind already ransacked, and ran hither and thither in the storehouse of my thoughts. However, he did not succeed in finding the beautiful, lustrous gems full of meaning which would be worthy of being offered on this [small] letter-plate to the master of the age and his assembled company. [?] In the end, I was reduced to the inadequate practice of threading onto the knotted string of writing these insignificant, worthless, little black beads.

*The steed of my thoughts is kept on a tight rein  
For he is still learning how to walk gracefully  
If my style lacks finesse, don't find fault  
It is a first impulse of nature and is still immature.*



(iv) *Apologies for incompetence*

The fourth motif, of jewels in a necklace, addresses the same theme of inadequacy. 'By comparison with 'those mind-bewildering jewels of expression polished up by the unique pen of the master jeweller', in Nergisi's hands 'thousands of mines full of brilliant jewels, perhaps even those sparkling, lustrous diamonds stolen from the hands of the Prophet Hizr at the source of the water of life' would lie crooked and disordered. He has not been given the gift of appropriate expression.

Even were the water of life to be dropped into the ink which oozes from the cleft nib of the stubby, inadequate pen of an unskilled writer like me, still the [misplaced] courage to correspond with you, the noble lord, master of the workshop of skill and eloquence, would originate from not knowing my own limitations; it would be better to remain tongue-tied in the corner of silence.

**Letter 4: Nergisi to Veysi**

no title<sup>23</sup>

The four sections of this longer letter emphasize the importance of the correspondence to Nergisi. It appears not to be in direct response to a letter from Veysi, 'jewel of all time, pearl of the age', but at least in anticipation of one.

(i) *Avidly awaiting a letter*

Two main images appear in this section. The first is of Nergisi, tired and impatient for lack of a letter: 'watching anxiously for [your] promised kindness - those copies of your choice works - has sapped the strength of my resolve', and not sleeping well. Each day brings fresh hope.

Each morning at daybreak, the fast-running eye darts

23 Walsh, 286-8: letter 29. See also Haksever, "Veysi ve Nergisi'nin karşılıklı mektupları," 182-84.

quickly from side to side, hoping to catch sight of those things it desires, scanning intently the four points of the compass. Oh when will the much longed-for bright sunrise appear? To all sides I send scouts to meet those caravans of travellers who arrive on the morning breeze and bring comfort to the weak and lonely, but especially to those groups blown down the main highway from Üsküb, that joyous place. [Remembering] in what time of cheer was [news of] Joseph, much desired, flower-bedecked, brought by a fair breeze to the loving mind of the heart-stricken Jacob, I remain in turmoil between fear and anticipation.

(ii) *Desire to be in Veysi's company*

Distance and separation are expressed also through Nergisi's desire to meet Veysi again, and his pessimistic rose/nightingale conclusion that this is unlikely to happen.

*My great desire is once more to sit by your sideq  
and to gaze upon your face  
Alas! What am I saying? This is an impossible flight of fancy  
If only it were possible to see you even from a distance.  
As God is my witness, if the reins of desire were consigned to  
capable hands, the question of separation from the dust at  
my master's feet would be solved in the twinkling of an eye.  
I am not permitted to gaze upon the rose  
I am a nightingale, but have no wings*

(iii) *Hacı Ağa: no justice in the world*

Pessimism also extends to the affairs of Hacı Ağa, whose problem is apparently impossible to solve because the man he must deal with is already his enemy and is a powerful man in the district. No details of this dispute are discernible in the text, though it would seem to be long-running.



When establishing the details of this unfortunate [twist of] fate, the storyteller skilled in words of explanation is left breathless, the hand which [seeks] the consequences of things is [stayed by the stories the pen has to tell?].

Nergisi (or just possibly Hacı Ağa) puts a brave face on things, and ends this section enigmatically.

Praise be to God that an outward cheerfulness is a necessary part of an inverted melancholy, and that those insignificant goods have still not been plundered by raiders [in these oppressive times]. [?]

*Much of what I have contempt for stems from my own good fortune  
They think I'm afraid, though I live contentedly*

(iv) *Apologies for length of letter*

Nergisi's brief farewell draws attention to one of the general principles of the literary letter, its preferred length.

My lord, [this is] proof that the saying 'to talk at length about matters of friendship is [best]' is discourteous and is the cause of unwarranted annoyance. I apologise for my impudence. The attainment of my hopes depends upon your boundless kindness.

*I could write a thousand letters with my heart's blood  
I am not yet weary of explaining what I desire.*